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# SOCIETY OF WOMEN MUSICIANS.

THE

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING,

ON

**MONDAY, 29th NOVEMBER, 1915,**

AT THE

WOMEN'S INSTITUTE, 92, VICTORIA STREET, S.W.

BY MISS

**KATHARINE EGGAR.**

# FOREWORD

FROM THE COUNCIL OF THE SOCIETY OF WOMEN MUSICIANS.

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We feel a special pleasure in sending you a copy of MISS KATHARINE EGGAR'S Presidential Address, delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Women Musicians, on November 29th.

We have printed it in response to the wish of those who were present on the occasion, and also as a small tribute of our gratitude for the services which Miss Eggar has rendered our Society from its beginning, and more particularly for her work so enthusiastically done during the year 1915, as President.

The address was listened to with the deepest interest, and the audience was quick to appreciate its beauty, and to acknowledge its inspiration. We are glad we can put before you all, in permanent form, thoughts so sincerely and convincingly expressed; and only regret that we cannot reproduce the intonation, atmosphere, and personal touch so characteristic of Miss Eggar's spoken word.

## MISS EGGAR'S PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

One of the unwritten rules of our Society is that the President shall deliver an address at some time during her year of office. You will observe that I have only just squeezed mine into the year—in fact, I had forgotten all about this duty, and when, the other day, I was reminded of it, I hopefully pointed out that there was no time left in which to give a Presidential address. However, some brilliant member of Council suggested my taking the opportunity of the Annual General Meeting to hold forth to you. I thought I had cornered that proposal successfully by saying that I should have ceased to be President by five o'clock this afternoon; but the Rules of the Society were thereupon produced to show me that the new President is elected, not by the General Meeting, but at the first Council Meeting after it. So there was nothing to do, but to submit, and make my final Presidential appearance as an Addressor.

I wish I could make you feel how glad I really am to have the opportunity of speaking to you in this way. During the four years of the Society's life I have been very closely in touch with its members and its activities, and it is a very great pleasure to meet you for this talk before my Presidential year comes to an end.

Someone wanted me to have the *Subject* of my address announced on the Agenda for to-day, but I did not feel then that I could choose any particular subject that would be appropriate; and now it seems to me that our familiar S.W.M. gives us a threefold subject around which I can weave a few thoughts this afternoon. I will regard you first as a Society: secondly as Women; thirdly as Musicians.

First and foremost then—to take ourselves as a Society; I think it is in that capacity that the war-time has tested us and proved us. Those of you who were present at our Annual Meeting last year will remember how it was the opinion of many of us that the Society would disintegrate, that perhaps it *ought* to disintegrate; there seemed to be many elements pointing to either a temporary or a permanent cessation of the Society, and we met with various propositions, very much afraid that the days of S.W.M. were numbered. Instead of that, we found what was a joyful surprise (and a most precious reward to those of us who had worked all the time for the interests of the members); we found that, far from wishing to let the Society lapse, these hard times had made members realise that they were a Society of friends—that they would be deeply sorry to lose the friendly bond which had gradually formed; and so we find ourselves to-day still a Society, still a company of friends who value the mutual fellowship. The fact is, that association has come to mean far more to us in these days; for comradeship is the very essence of our present living: and my own feeling about the S.W.M. is that its real work is still to come, and that these first years have been intended for the welding of what I may really call the family feeling between us; and if we had done nothing more I should consider that we had done something valuable in forming that consciousness of relationship between ourselves. More I need not say, as you have all just heard the year's report of our doings; but I metaphorically raise my glass to you as the Society.

Then to pass on to the consideration of ourselves as Women—the world is a very different place for us now, from what it was a few years ago. When we look back, we see what a wonderful time of preparation there has been for the problems of to-day—how the whole story of the Women's movement was

a providential clearing of the ground for our present difficulties. Where should we be to-day if women were at the stage that they were in Florence Nightingale's time? It is easy to understand the difference that has come about in women's work and position as nurses and doctors; but think of all the other things in which there is a difference. Think of all the stuffiness and all the cobwebs which have been swept away by the breezes, and, it must be owned, destructive gales, of modern thought and feeling. Can you not see what it has meant for women themselves to have got used to travelling, to having clubs, to looking after themselves, to having big and serious interests of their own, to being a vital part of a world larger than their own sitting-rooms? Can you not see what it has meant for the world, for men in all classes of society, to become *accustomed* to women doctors, women guardians, women clerks, women gardeners, women speakers, women farmers, women professors?

Suppose the war had come before the Suffrage movement had run its fevered course—before that soul-searching controversy had let light and air in upon the shams and hypocrisies, the injustices and the iniquities of our supposed-to-be respectable conventions: if we had had to meet the German beast before we had faced the beast in ourselves?

It is strange to recall the old Anti-Suffrage arguments, that women ought not have the vote because the last resort in everything was physical force—that women were so ill-balanced and impulsive that they would be certain to embroil their country in war (and not being able to fight, would of course not mind doing so)—that they could never be trusted to have any judgment in questions affecting the empire. No German could have put a case better.

Well, personally I am inclined to envy the men whose clear duty it is to become soldiers—it is such a simple solution of all difficulties ; and as to embroiling one's country in war, I should like to know how much less chance there would have been for the Kaiser to make war if the women of his country had been trained in the freedom of ours. And I really can hardly believe that if women, trained for years to that work, had been in the Cabinet, they would have made *more* of a hash in questions affecting the Empire than the men, with all their long hereditary and individually acquired training, seem to have made. But, thank Heaven, the real work of the world is not done in Parliament, and when one looks at things as they really are, one sees a wonderful and yet perfectly natural co-operation between men and women to bear the burden which is laid upon the Empire.

The present is taking care of itself—the urgency of the work to be done solves most problems for the workers. What of the future? If the women's movement was a preparation for the conditions of to-day, for what are to-day's conditions preparing us?

One of the Recruiting Posters had a picture of an uncomfortable-looking father being questioned, at some date still in the future, by two enquiring children—"Daddy, what did *you* do to help in the Great War?" I should like you to imagine a companion picture to that, in which the question, *asked now*, should be, "What are you going to do to help *after* the Great War?" I don't say that it's easy to answer that question, but it is extremely important to put it to ourselves, and also to each other—for in the multitude of counsellors perchance there lacketh not wisdom, and these things need much talking over. Of course, a great many people have found their vocation thanks to the war ; many women have at last had the chance, denied them all their lives before, of doing

what they were best fitted for; others, again, who had played all their lives, have found the joy of *work*, independent of the form of occupation. To some of these, the occupation is but a temporary thing, to end when the war ends. What will they do afterwards? I have a typical case in mind—a girl who has done splendidly as a Nurse, but who before the war lived a play existence in which her energies never had any very serious object: but the war has shown her, not that she should be a Nurse—she does not feel drawn to make that her profession—but that she *cannot* go back to life as it was. Already she is asking herself again and again—"What *shall* I do when this work is over?"

Each of us must face the question of what to do after the war—each must work out the answer in readiness for that time—for herself. But may I give just one thought to be borne in mind? It is this—that we should not accept the limitation which is so generally laid round women's work, namely that it is essentially and sacredly our one duty to repair other people's damages. Philanthropic work of all kinds, of course, will offer many fields for our energies, but we must not lose sight of the glorious fact that we are here to construct, not only to repair; to create what is fair and sweet, not only to cleanse what is foul.

Before I leave this part of my subject, I ask you to remember what a responsibilty will now devolve upon the women of the Empire with regard to the up-bringing of children. Consider the numbers of children who after the war will have only their mothers to look to—no father. What a tremendous responsibility—what a tremendous chance. It is a tragic solving of the Suffrage question; but what a glorious privilege is placed with our sex. The generation to come will testify to what stuff its mothers were made of. God grant that the testimony may be a proud one.

And, now, to say a few words to you as Musicians—our responsibilities seem to class themselves under three heads—Mental, Physical and Spiritual.

Under the Mental heading comes all our work as teachers. Probably everyone in this room is concerned in some degree or other with the teaching of music, and, in any case, teaching is very specially women's work. In the teaching of music, as of any other subject, it is not only the actual treatment of the subject that matters, but also, and very greatly, the influence of the teacher. Now, in the time to come after the war—though surely we shall have learnt enough to feel that the arts are supremely important—there will, without doubt, be a danger of pressure from the material struggle. It is difficult to foresee exactly what our conditions will be when we come to peace, but we may be poor in a way that we are not used to, and, therefore, a great many of us may feel that money-making is our great duty. By this I do not mean money-grubbing in the bad sense —in the vulgar sense; but from a quite honourable point of view, from the feeling that our children must not have less than we should have given them before, that we must first and foremost bring our incomes up to what they were, that we must be able to do what we did before, and so on. Well, let us not imbue the children with this feeling; let us protect them from getting the idea that making money is the first thought in our minds. Of course it is not possible to dissociate music and money-making in the case of people who have to earn their living by music; but if we have the care of those who have to learn music to make money by it, do let us strive to make them feel that to make beautiful music is a far more essentially important thing than to make money. I do not mean that you need put this ever into actual words, but the result of your contact with your pupils should be that they imperceptibly come to have that feeling. If you are doing that, though you may be supposed to

be only teaching them music, you are in reality giving them a liberal education, that is, an education that makes free, that liberates the mind from the slavery of physical conditions. If the pupil you have taught can ever say, thanks to you, "My mind to me a kingdom is," your teaching is something to be proud of.

With regard to the Physical aspect of music, I would beg you most earnestly to use your influence against *noise*. Before the War, one was laughed at for protesting against the *danger* of noise. Now we have men coming home in scores, wrecked by nothing but noise—men without a scratch; and doctors are at last faced with the definite effects of noise on strong men in the pick of condition, and can no longer dismiss them as the nervous fancies of highly-strung women. Ought not this to make us musicians recognise noise for the evil thing that it is, and resolve with all our might to eliminate it from music? Noise and music are absolutely antagonistic, yet we tolerate noise and admire it when it masquerades as "big tone," "magnificent climaxes," "bewilderingly complex scores," or whatever may be the grandiloquent description. Let us determine to make it our responsibility that noise shall not contaminate the music which we individually control, and, seeing what dire injury has been wrought by noise, let us endeavour to make music a means of healing.

Then, in conclusion, to turn to music as a Spiritual force—as an expression of the higher mind in us—there remains much, very much, for us to realise.

I was at a Recital of Indian Songs the other evening, and the husband of the singer, in giving the audience a little discourse upon Indian Music, quoted the criticism which a countryman of his own had made after hearing Western music; which was to the effect that our songs had no connection with

higher things—that they were entirely concerned with ordinary daily life, and that they ignored the spiritual side of human nature altogether.

Now when one gets an independent criticism of this kind, one ought to profit by it. It seems to me that these words, though severe, are perfectly just; and the uncomfortable part of them is that they apply very particularly to women, for the output of women composers in song-writing has been far in excess of all their other work in composition put together. What an indictment, then, is this for us, the supposed-to-be Idealists of the race! Doesn't it sting?

I beg you, I beseech you, if you *must* write songs, if you *must* link music with words, to maintain a high *literary* standard, a high standard of *sentiment*, at least. Have a fine taste in poetry, and remember that your music has got to express something more still. I must quote (from an article on the Making of Songs, which appeared a short time ago in *The Times*) a few lines putting this matter very aptly. The writer speaks of the tendency of so many people to choose, for musical setting, words which "allow no scope for musical enlargement, because they are merely a string of assertions without an aspiration, or else, an aspiration of so concrete a kind that the words can convey it in precise terms." (Ponder that, and remember it when next you are given a lyric to consider.) And then comes this: "Music only begins to be relevant when there is something to be said which words cannot compass alone, some idea which eludes definition. Apart from that, Music is merely a frivolous ornament."

I think that if we have felt, as, doubtless, many of us have felt, that there was no place for music under present conditions, this feeling was due to our having previously had no such austere view of the function of music as the one quoted. We have no

room nowadays for frivolous ornament ; we cannot stand anything cheap or insincere ; it jars ; and perhaps we have been shown, in a way that nothing less terrible would have shown, how frivolous, how cheap, how insincere much of the music which we used to accept really was. Let us, then, gladly and thankfully own to our clearer sight, our more fastidious feeling, and let the poor stuff sink into oblivion ; but, at the same time, let us renew our faith in the essential virtue of the art, and acknowledge it as a means whereby we may free the spirit's wings We need a true enthusiasm to carry us through these dark times, when it is difficult to feel as musical as we should like, and to sustain our belief and sweeten our hope in music. Enthusiasm is a word which has lost its original meaning, although we certainly nowadays have redeemed it from the implication which it bore about a century ago. It implied then a silly infatuation, and I remember once reading on a tombstone to a highly belauded lady in Bath Abbey that she was "*pious without enthusiasm*"! That makes you smile, because "enthusiasm" has for us only a good and admirable meaning ; but, even so, it falls short of the original significance, which was *acting under the influence of a god.* It was only after due and solemn preparation that the worshipper became a channel for the power of the god to manifest itself ; that he became inspired. And that is the kind of enthusiasm we need ; we need to prepare ourselves to be inspired and to believe that we can make ourselves the channels for something greater than our mundane selves, which shall sweep through us and express itself in us.

At all costs, keep your enthusiasm in music ; guard it as you would guard a precious flame in a wind. It may have burnt dim for the moment, but it can be revived, and from that little spark may be kindled the fire of true inspiration which will be worth everything else besides that you have to offer.